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ABSTRACT

An exploratory study of the feasibility of the Language Experience Approach (LEA) for teaching reading to semi-literate students of English as a second language (ESL) is presented. The instructional approach uses knowledge and interests from the students' own experience as the basis for teaching reading comprehension. The method was used with two Indochinese adolescent refugees for 14 days. Positive effects were observed in both subjects' behavior and reading ability. The period of instruction using the LEA techniques was found to be too short to implement some of the desired premises and standards. Further study is suggested on (1) use of controlled measures for assessment, (2) development of materials for language experience stories, (3) reading strategies used by semi-literate ESL students, (4) procecures for teaching reading to this population, and (5) applicability of LEA with other special populations and in other cultural contexts. (MSE)

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LEA AS A METHODOLOGY FOR USE WITH SEMI-LITERATE ESOL ADOLESCENTS: A CASE STUDY

By

Alba C. Ben-Barka

4/16/1982

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This project is part of the Seminar Paper submitted to Professor Charles R. Hancock in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

ABSTRACT

The scope of the present investigation was to gain insights into the feasibility of the Language Experience Approach for teaching reading to semi-literate ESOL adolescents. Diagnosis of the students' language and reading ability was made at the outset of instruction. Observation of the students' behavior was reported. The investigator also described selected reading strategies for use with semi-literate ESOL adolescents. The conclusions arrived at in this study suggest that the LEA is an appropriate strategy in terms of teacher time and resources as well as relevance for the particular subjects of this case study.

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RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

In recent years, teachers and educators have expressed a pressing need for information dealing specifically with illiterate and semi-literate ESOL adolescents because of the increasing number of pupils coming into the U. S. educational system with non-existent literacy skills. One of the major problems to be dealt with is the lack of research focusing on instructional reading strategies and methodology for working with these students.

Participation in a Literacy Workshop, held in the Summer 1981, generated this investigator's consciousness of some of the factors at play when teaching reading to illiterate and semi-literate ESOL adolescents. A feeling for the immediate needs of these pupils directed this investigator's efforts toward selecting strategies and a methodology that may be feasible with certain ESOL illiterate and semi-literate adolescents in gaining some literacy skills by working on the three cue systems--the graphophonic, the syntactic, and the semantic systems. The three systems identified here work together to provide the language information readers utilize to derive meaning from written language (Goodman, 1973, p. 295).

A brief overview of the literature on the teaching of reading clearly indicated the paucity of research dealing with the teaching of reading to speakers of English as a second language. A Fall 1981 ERIC title search further supported the need for research in this area. That search failed to indicate any research on the teaching of reading to illiterate and semi-literate ESOL adolescents.

The rationale for this study rests partly on the need for research, partly on the experience of working with these students, and partly on a belief in the language experience approach. It was anticipated that the

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The author wishes to acknowledge helpful comments and suggestions offered by Dr. Charles R. Hancock during the development of this paper.

present exploratory study would yield insights into the feasibility of using the LEA methodology with semi-literate ESOL adolescent students in initial reading instruction.

THE PROBLEM

Significance of the Problem

Reading is the principal means, for the literate man, of acquiring not merely information, but also concepts and experiences of various types. The lack of reading ability constitutes a serious handicap in a highly literate, highly competitive society like that of the United States. The vast majority of Indochinese refugees who have come to the United States in the last decade, are in great need of literacy training; the ability to read, and, consequently, to acquire insights and understandings of society, is of fundamental importance in a literate society. As LeFevre (1966) aptly stated, "reading is a powerful means to maturity and acculturation" (p. 293). Without reading an individual will not be able to survive effectively, let alone participate in a literate society.

Much of the current perspective on reading in the United States has grown from psycholinguistic theory. Psycholinguistics is a field concerned with the cognitive processes involved in a learner's language development based on his mental needs and experiential background. When applied to reading, the focus of psycholinguistics is on the reader's make-up: how he expresses, stores, and processes information.

In the case of the semi-literate Indochinese adolescents, whose oral English skills and reading ability are not very well developed, the teacher is faced with the problem of not only gaining insights into the reader's make-up, but also of providing him with conceptual and experiential

opportunities. As mentioned earlier, the development of concepts and experiences as well as language development are a prerequisite for reading.

Since the 1950s a growing number of researchers has investigated the applicability of the language experience approach to reading (Stauffer, 1970; Hall, 1977). Examination of the research on LEA since 1950, indicated that a major quantity of it has concentrated on using it with native speakers of English in the United States, particularly at the primary levels.

Statement of the Problem

The scope of this study was exploratory in nature. It purported to seek tentative evidence for the feasibility of the language experience approach for teaching reading to semi-literate ESOL adolescents. While there is some evidence that the LEA is being used effectively with ESOL students (Hall, 1977, p.31), no research has been reported on effective reading strategies for use with semi-literate ESOL adolescents. It is expected that the findings of this study will encourage ESOL teachers and educators to pursue this line of investigation since it has been, for the most part, unexplored.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In exploring the applicability of the LEA methodology for teaching reading to semi-literate Indochinese pupils, the investigator considered the following questions:

1. Which reading strategies are effective in working with these students?
2. To what extent is the LEA methodology feasible, specifically in terms of two criteria: resource materials and teacher's time?

DEFINITION OF TERMS

For the purpose of this study, selected terms have been defined in alphabetical order below:

1. Decoding systems: systems of cues which provide the language information readers utilize to derive meaning from written language. The following are the three decoding cue systems:
   a. graphophonic: a system whereby the reader utilizes his knowledge of spelling sound patterns while perceiving the printed cues, such as letters, words, and punctuation marks.
   b. syntactic: knowledge of sentence patterns, pattern markers usually suffixes, that signal information or redundantly confirm the use of a word, or function words that point to meaning bearing elements.
   c. semantic: system consisting of concepts, information and other experiences elicited by the printed message (Singer, 1973, p.410).
2. Decoding: to convert a language code into a meaningful message.
3. Language: a functional, communicative code that represents the learned behavior of a social community (Stauffer, 1970, p.4).
4. Language experience approach (LEA): a personal, communicative, creative, and functional way of learning and teaching, which capitalizes on the learner's speech patterns and thinking as a foundation of reading instruction (Hall, 1976).
5. Oral Language Proficiency P-Rating: a system developed by the Foreign Service Institute to describe an interviewee's oral language and listening comprehension ability.

6. Prediction: the well-informed elimination of unlikely alternatives (Smith, 1973, p.29).
7. Psycholinguistics: a field of study concerned with the language learner's cognitive and affective make-up. It provides a meaning-centered approach to reading in that it focuses on the processes and strategies employed by the reader.
8. Psycholinguistic process: the cognitive and linguistic interaction between author and reader whereby the reader is actively involved in gaining meaning from the text (DuBois & Stice, 1981, p.173).
9. Reading: a psycholinguistic guessing game by which the reader reconstructs a message that had been encoded by a writer as a graphic display (Goodman, 1973, p.21).
10. Reading comprehension: the reconstruction, interpretation, and evaluation of what the author of the written material means by using knowledge gained from life experience (Page & Pinnell, 1979, p.4).
11. Semi-literate: a person who has the following characteristics: (a) no reading and writing skills in the native language; (b) exposure to formal education; and (c) minimal literacy skills, i.e., recognition of graphic symbolization; knowledge of the alphabet and 30-60% sight word vocabulary from standardized lists (Salviroli Sight Word List); and certain pre-reading skills.
12. Strategy: a general pattern developed by the reader to make use of the various cues available in reading print (Goodman, 1973, p.300).

DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The following limitations delineate the parameters of this study:

1. This investigation was limited to the LEA methodology.
2. Although the learners received instruction in all three cue systems (graphophonic, syntactic and semantic), emphasis was placed on semantic cues.
3. The present study was limited to an investigation of only two subjects (two semi-literate Laotian adolescents).
4. No standardized reading measures designed specifically for semi-literate ESOL students were used.
5. Only the Foreign Service Institute P-Rating was used to measure the oral proficiency of these students.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

For purposes of this study, it was assumed that:

1. There was the need for more research on the LEA methodology, specifically to its applicability for teaching reading to semi-literate ESOL adolescents.
2. The semi-literate ESOL adolescents who entered the U.S. educational system in the last decade had very little background information, a paucity of concepts and experiences, little exposure to language, poorly developed native language, and scarce knowledge of English.
3. Language and reading develop in relation to the experience and conceptual growth of the learner.
4. Concepts in reading are gained through the learner's semantic input.
5. The basic tenets of psycholinguistic theory were also applicable to non-native English speakers.

6. Reading progress was made to the extent that the reading approach capitalized on the learner's cognitive, emotive, experiential background, and his level of interest.
7. The LEA met the criteria described in assumption number five.
8. The Foreign Service Institute P-Rating was a valid and reliable measure of the pupil's oral proficiency.
9. A minimal oral proficiency of approximately P-1 was a prerequisite to reading.

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

> Methods of learning to read come and go across the educational arena like the march of super-numeraries upon the stage. Each is heralded as the final solution of the problem of learning to read; but each in turn gives way to some later discovery. The single fact is, that they all lack the essential of any well grounded method, namely relevance to the child's mental needs. No scheme for learning can supply this want. Only a new motive--putting the child in a vital relation to the things to be read--can be of service here (Dewey as quoted in Betts, 1957, p.8).

The initial review of the literature on research since the 1950s lent much support to Dewey's statement. In fact, numerous investigators have researched methods of learning and teaching reading: the phonic, the basal, the sight word, the linguistic, the language experience and the eclectic approaches. Extensive volumes have been written on reading methods for use with native speakers of English in the U.S. (Spache, 1964; Stauffer, 1970; Durkin, 1974; Lee & Rubin, 1979). However, much effort is spent on endless controversies (Powell, 1973, p.3), but the real challenge of meeting the learner's mental needs is often not met (Betts, 1957).

Meeting the needs of ESOL students in initial reading instruction was not dealt with in detail in the reviewed literature. Most studies of learning to read and of the reading process have been carried out within the context

of a limited cultural range (Feitelson, 1978, p.viii). Some research has focused on teaching reading to literate ESOL students (Thonis, 1970; Clarke & Silberstein, 1977; Murphy, 1980); to a lesser extent, research is also available on teaching ESL to illiterate adults (Indochinese Refugee Education Guide #9).

In an attempt to gain insights into the processes the ESOL learner is engaged in when first learning to read, the investigator concentrated primarily on a theory and a methodology which, during the initial review of the literature, appeared to be applicable to the semi-literate ESOL adolescent. The present section was organized into two sections: (10 the psycholinguistic approach to reading, and (2) the language experience approach.

The Psycholinguistic Approach

According to Murphy (1980, p.193), the following three assumptions underlying psycholinguistic theory were relevant to ESL readers:

1. that a certain amount of oral proficiency is necessary before the act of reading can take place (Goodman & Burke, 1972);

2. that reading is a process which involves deriving meaning from a printed text through simultaneous use of graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic information (Goodman, 1976); and

3. that readers must have experiences to relate to the text or they can only decode nonsense (Smith & Lindberg, 1977).

As Murphy (1980) pointed out, the insights psycholinguistics has contributed to the reading process, appear to apply not only to monolingual English speakers, but also to bilingual and/or ESL speakers.

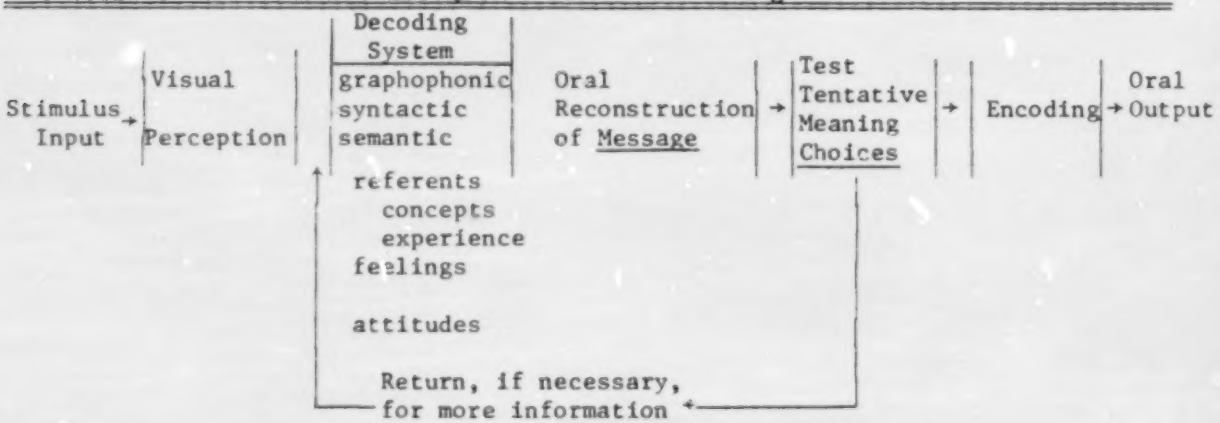
Goodman's work (1968; 1972; 1973) probably represented a cornerstone of the reading process. Basic to Goodman's explanation of reading (1968) are the three cue systems utilized by the reader to decode a message. That

is, the three cue systems--the graphophonic, syntactic and semantic systems--work together to reconstruct the message. This leads to tentative meaning choices that are then tested and, if necessary, modified by going back to get more information. The reader will understand the message to the extent that he shares concepts, experiences, and language with the writer of the message. If the reader does not have sufficient experience and conceptual development, he will not be able to comprehend the message (p.188).

Singer (1973) represented Goodman's model of reading graphically as follows:

Table 1

Goodman's Implicit Model of Reading



Meaning is an essential component in Goodman's definition of reading. It is also at the core of Smith's (1973) psycholinguistic approach to reading. According to Smith, "reading is not primarily a visual process" (p.6). The two kinds of information involved in reading are the visual information, which comes from print, and the non-visual information deriving from the brain. Smith defined non-visual information as what the reader already knows about reading, about language, and about the world in general. Although the first

type of information--print--is important, it is the second type of information which brings meaning to print (p.6). Both types of information are essential for reading to take place.

Smith (1973) explicitly stated the two contributions of psycholinguistics to information processing, i.e. to reading. The first contribution was that "there is a trade-off between visual and non-visual information"; the more information stored in the brain, the less visual information is required to identify a letter, a word, or a meaning from the text. Conversely, the less nonvisual information is available, because the text deals with an unfamiliar subject matter or because it is written in language that is not easy to comprehend, the slower reading tends to be and the visual information is needed (p.7).

The second psycholinguistic contribution to reading cited by Smith (1973) was that "there is a severe limit to the amount of information coming through the eye that the visual system can process" (p.7). Relying primarily on visual information will overload the visual system of the reader who will, subsequently, not be able to get as much information as he needs. Moreover, concentration on individual words will prevent the reader from getting any sense from the passage he reads. He will be unable to read for meaning and, consequently, read for nonsense.

In summary, the following three insights into reading characterized Smith's (1973) viewpoint: (1) only a small part of the information necessary for reading comprehension comes from the printed page; (2) comprehension must precede the identification of individual words; and (3) reading is not decoding to spoken language (p.8).

A common theme in the work of Smith (1973) and Goodman (1973) is represented by their notion of reading as (a) information processing, and

(b) total psycholinguistic process. Goodman provided a useful description of this process. In seeking to reconstruct the writer's encoded message, the reader: (1) interacts with the graphic symbols; (2) concentrates his total prior experience; and (3) draws on his experience, concepts, and language competence (p.162). Moreover, since reading is a total process, it should not be "...fractionated into constituent bits or skills." According to Goodman, breaking up reading into subskills would "qualitatively change not only the process, which through its interrelationships is much more than the sum of its parts, but also change the nature of the parts since they normally function as part of a complex process" (p.163).

Therefore, the integration of all the parts, the cognitive--emotive--linguistic--experiential--conceptual framework of the reader, is considered fundamental in Goodman and Smith's psycholinguistic approach to reading.

It is precisely this same type of integration which is the essence of the language, feelings, thinking, and experiences of the learner used as a foundation for LEA instruction (Hall, 1976, p.7).

The Language Experience Approach

Following is a description of the LEA. Included in this section are the rationale, the objectives, the assumptions, the procedures, the materials and the applicability of the LEA to ESOL students in initial reading instruction, as interpreted from the review of the literature.

Rationale

The rationale of the LEA rests on the constructive use of the language experience--cognitive--emotive wealth of information which the learner brings to reading (Stauffer, 1970, p. 258). Since the starting point of instruction is the level of the learner, the rationale for the LEA methodology rests on the entire process the reader is engaged in, the organization of his

thoughts, interests, feelings, and ambitions. The value of the LEA approach is that it starts from comprehension (Hall, 1976).

Objective

Hall (1976) singled out the basic objective of the LEA approach: to foster communication in a creative, personal, and functional way by using the semantic imput of the learner through guidance from the teacher (p.vii). Therefore, the learner's speech determines the language patterns of the reading materials, and his experiences determine the content (p.2). In summary, the goal of the language experience approach as described by Sylvia Ashton Warner is the following:

> The professional formula--release the native imagery of our child and use it for working material--remains timeless, changeless and axiomatic but the application of it needs constant variation (Hall, 1976, p.2).

Assumptions

The LEA is founded on the following assumptions:

1. Reading is a language-based process dependent upon the processing of meaning through the use of printed symbols.
2. The nature of language as a communication system has implications for the teaching of reading as a form of language communication.
3. Readers are users of language.
4. The interrelationship of oral and written language affects the reading process (Hall, 1976, p.6).

Procedures

Burke and Jurenkz (n.d.,p.2) suggested the following sequence of instruction:

1. Provide or focus in on an experience.
2. Establish motivation and reason for recording the experience.

3. Orally evaluate and organize the experience.
4. Dictate/record the experience.
5. Reread and edit the narrative.
6. Provide opportunity for future reading.

Materials

The instructional environment should be stimulating. Materials useful for the LEA are "realia, materials to experiment with and manipulate, art and craft materials, simple musical instruments, records, tapes, puppets, costumes, most fundamentally, writing materials (Burke & Jurenkz, n.d., p.2).

Applicability to ESOL Students

Several studies can be cited that indicate the applicability of the LEA for special populations, i.e., linguistically different children, students from lower socioeconomic levels, remedial students, and adult illiterates. Hall (1977)discussed a number of studies carried out on special populations. In 1933, Merriam reported impressive gains in reading achievement obtained among Mexican-American students using the language experience approach. In 1973, Calvert's research concluded that a LEA program can enhance the writing achievement of Mexican-American students, as well as their reading study skills. Mendenhall's (1973) investigation of self-acceptance in a language experience program was conducted with second graders (p.31).

According to Hall (1977), there is need for further research on the use of the LEA with special populations since few major research efforts have addressed this issue (p.31).

SUMMARY

The purpose of this review was to provide a theoretical framework for the applicability of the language experience approach in initial reading instruction to ESOL students, specifically to semi-literate ESOL adolescents.

The reviewed literature appeared to indicate the value of psycholinguistic insights and of the LEA methodology in providing a sound foundation on which to construct and develop reading ability.

PROJECT DESIGN

For the purposes of this investigation, research consisted of a three-week case study, conducted during the month of March, 1982. The procedures of the study were designed to produce some insights into the applicability of the LEA methodology in initial reading instruction of semi-literate Indochinese adolescents. Included in this section are a description of the procedures used in conducting the research and a discussion of the findings obtained in the course of the investigation.

Procedures

This section described the following procedural steps that were taken in order to complete this study: subject selection; behavioral observation and diagnostic testing; implementation of the language experience approach.

Subject Selection

Prior to the outset of the present study, ten pupils were chosen by the regular ESOL classroom instructor on the basis of the criteria established by the investigator. The two criteria were:

1. a minimal oral proficiency of approximately P-1; and
2. immediate need and/or difficulties encountered by the students in learning to read in relation to the length of time they had resided in the U.S.

The next step was a 15-20 minute interview held with each of the ten students. Final selection of the two students was made based on the researcher's overall judgment of the subjects' needs, oral proficiency, and desire to

participate in the LEA program. Additional diagnostic and demographic information on the subjects is provided in the section on findings.

Behavioral Observation and Diagnostic Testing

Diagnostic procedures were initiated at the outset of the present study. Assessment of the students' strengths and weaknesses was obtained over a one-week period. It involved the following categories of information: (1) general language ability; (2) reading ability; and (3) interest inventory.

The following two measures were used to assess the subjects' general language ability.

1. Thumbnail diagnostic placement test in English as a second language. The test was designed by Virginia F. Allen as an initial leveling instrument. It consisted of ten completion statements or questions, each worth ten points.
2. The Foreign Service Institute Rating Procedure. The students were interviewed and taped. A general judgment about the student's language proficiency was made in terms of five verbal descriptions of competence (see Appendix A, p.32 for descriptions).

Reading ability was assessed using the following two measures:

1. Haverson's (1981) pre-reading checklist. It included nine categories; for example, listening skills, motor skills, visual perception, ability to manipulate language (see Appendix B, p. 39 for a sample of the checklist).
2. The Base reading test. Divided into nine sections, this test assesses pre-reading skills and diagnoses the student's instructional level within the pre-primer or the first grade level.

3. The Silvaroli classroom reading inventory. This inventory is a diagnostic tool used in elementary school (grade 2 through 10). Test Form A was administered on the fourth day of this investigation. The students completed three parts: the graded word lists, the graded oral paragraphs, and the sight word vocabulary. The paragraphs had been evaluated for their readability level (see Appendices C and D).

In order to ascertain the level of the student's interest in reading, an interest inventory was devised and completed by each subject. The information disclosed by the students was employed as a source of motivation and in choosing reading materials for use with pupils (see Appendix E, p. 49 for a copy of the interest inventory).

Implementation of the Language Experience Program

Following is a description of the LEA program.

Methods

The LEA methodology was used on a daily basis for fourteen days: one class period a day and three additional class periods a week. Each class period lasted 45 minutes. Hours of instruction amounted to 6 hours per week, for a total of 15 hours.

It was felt that emphasis would be on the following responsibilities:

1. directing the student's thinking in order to develop categorizations, concepts and experiences;
2. providing the stimulus for the experience whenever necessary;
3. organizing the experience story orally to promote communication;
4. recording the dictated story or description;
5. reading the story; focusing on reading comprehension;

6. taking words out of the story context and placing them into a different but meaningful context;
7. promoting evaluation and application of the experience; and
8. developing follow-up activities to clarify and reinforce reading concepts.

Early at the beginning of the term, the researcher attempted to convey to the students the value she placed on self-expression and students' thinking. Extensive praise and encouragement were given to the students in order to build up their self-concept which, due to their low level of literacy, also appeared to be rather low.

In addition, care was taken to make the class setting attractive and interesting. Realia, art and craft materials, sewing notions, paper dolls, self-adhesive paper, stencils, a printing set, and a variety of writing materials were provided and, subsequently, employed by the students. The materials offered the pupils some initial stimuli and motivation for oral discussion, writing, and reading.

Techniques

To motivate the students, to stimulate their thinking, and to develop their creativity, a variety of techniques were employed according to the "learning by doing" axiom.

1. "Personal" Experience Stories: Activities based on picture-stimulus, manipulation of paper dolls, and making a self-collage were centered around the students themselves.

   Self-collage Activity: A filmstrip was shown in class to introduce the concept of making a collage. Materials and procedures were discussed. Self-expression and creativity were emphasized.

Students worked on their own or in teams, depending on their levels.

Follow-up Activity: Given samples of creative poems produced in Weaver's (1980, p.257) class, the students were asked to develop their own poems. The pupils had previously answered the twelve questions suggested by Weaver so that it was a matter of combining sentences with the assistance of the researcher.

2. Exposure to New Material: After mixing the ingredients together, the students made letters and shapes with the dough. The purpose of this activity was mainly to provide the experience of manipulating the playdough, a material the pupils had not been familiar with. A direct product of the activity was a student dictated story.

Follow-up Activity: The students read the story, underlining the words they identified; these words were taken in and out of context to ensure mastery of meaning.

3. Fairy Tale:

Red Riding Hood Activity: Dramatization and narration of Red Riding Hood provided the opportunity to promote predictive thinking.

Follow-up Activity: vocabulary practice and expansion was provided in an imaginative setting.

(For a sample of the language experience stories produced by the subjects, refer to Appendix F, p.51).

Reading Strategies

Following is a summary of selected reading strategies, presented according to three cue systems, utilized during the course of instruction.

Graphophonic system:

1. word attack through phonic analysis of initial sounds and rhyming words;
2. sound/letter relationship;
3. association of letter symbols with corresponding letter sound;
4. recognition, writing, and sounding letters and words, written in both cursive and print.

Syntactic system:

1. word attack through structural analysis;
2. sight words from Silvaroli's list, especially function words put into context;
3. written construction drill;
4. punctuation.

Semantic system:

1. word attack through context analysis;
2. using picture clues and discussion to predict semantic message encoded by the writer;
3. main idea: title, topic sentence;
4. personal vocabulary from the language experience stories (sight word bank); words put into sentence context;
5. putting words into a meaningful context by using broad categories.

Subjects

The subjects in this case study were two Laotian refugees residing in Prince George's County. Both attended a junior high school where they

received instruction in other academic subjects as well as ESOL.

The initial interview held prior to this investigation revealed certain similarities between the two subjects. The following table indicates the data culled from the interviews.

Table 2

Background Data

	Subject I	Subject II
Age	13 1/2	14
Sex	M	F
Oral proficiency level*	OC	OC
Size of family	Large	Large
Socioeconomic background	Low	Low
Length of residence in the U.S.	1 1/2 yrs.	2 yrs.

*Explanation of the up-dated ratings is included in Appendix A, p. 32.

At first glance, the data shown in Table 2 may indicate the students' comparable age, length of residence in the United States, oral proficiency, and socioeconomic background. However, a closer examination revealed important differences in personality and behavioral characteristics. From the outset, it was clear that the first subject was a rather sociable adolescent, playful with his peers but reserved with the adults in the school. Additionally, he appeared to have good listening comprehension skills and long term memory but poor fine motor skills.

The female subject, on the other hand, showed high motivation from the start, to the point of appearing aggressive. In addition, she appeared to be talkative, dependent on her peers yet withdrawn and not part of her

group. Of the two, the female subject showed greater interest and desire for individual attention during the interviews.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data in this case study were based upon a three-week term of instruction using primarily the LEA methodology with two semi-literate Laotian adolescents. The two subjects resided in Prince George's County and attended one of the junior high schools in the area. The first subject was a male; the second one a female. Both came from low socioeconomic backgrounds, large-sized, semi-literate families. Also, residency in the United States was approximately one and a half to two years for both subjects.

The following section includes findings from: (1) behavioral observation and diagnostic testing; and (2) implementation of the LEA program in terms of the following criteria: selected reading strategies, resource materials and teacher's time. Discussion of the findings was also a part of this section.

Diagnostic Testing

This is a summary of gross diagnostic information obtained from the battery of tests administered to the subjects during the first week of instruction. As shown in Table 3, the results of the battery of tests indicated that, on the whole, the two subjects were at the pre-primer, instructional reading level. The oral proficiency level of OC, obtained from the up-dated version of the FSI Rating, indicated that the students were able to satisfy immediate needs using learned utterances. The complete syntactic structure of sentences was just beginning to emerge. Although most communication involved short memorized sentences, there were some signs of creativity and spontaneity.

Table 3

Diagnostic Tests

General Language Ability	Subject I	Subject II
Thumbnail Test of ESL	Nonindependent (beginning) level	Nonindependent (beginning) level
FSI Oral Proficiency Rating* Reading Ability	Level OC	Level OC
Haverson's pre-reading checklist*	70%	75%
Base Reading Test	29	32
Silvaroli Test*	Pre-Primer Instructional Reading Level	Pre-Primer Instructional Reading Level
Interest Inventory*	Moderate Interest	High Interest

*A sample of the up-dated procedure and explanation are included in Appendix A, p.36.

The data from the Base Reading Test and the Silvaroli Test showed only a limited knowledge (60%) of sight words (see the list in Appendix C, p.42), and low reading comprehension. The students appeared to have mastered pre-primer skills like following directions, discrimination of difficult lower-case letters and initial consonant letters/sounds. However, endings (e.g., s, ed, ing), diagraphs (e.g., th, ch, etc.), short vowels, and inference questions were still an area of weakness for both subjects.

The investigator observed the subjects in different settings and with a variety of peer groups. Instruction using the language experience approach appeared to have contributed to a change in the subjects' attitudes, self-concept, attention span, and ability to work in a group. These findings corroborated the data collected by Riendeau in a study conducted in 1973 on the effects of the language experience approach (Hall, 1977, p.13).

Behavioral Observations ✓ = indicates occurrence of trait

Apparent Personality Adjustment	Subject I		Subject II	
	Pre-Inst.	Post-Inst.	Pre-Inst.	Post-Inst.
emotional maturity		✓		
fair stability	✓	✓		✓
dependency			✓	
self-concept	inadequate	changing	inadequate	changing
assertiveness		✓	✓	✓
motivation	average	low-high	low-high	high-high
interaction with peers	✓	✓		emerging signs
need for individual attention	✓	✓	✓	✓
ability to work in a group	✓	✓		✓
attention span	average	high	average	average

Furthermore, observation of emerging signs of apparent personality adjustment and favorable attitudes of the subjects seemed to support Combs and Snygg's claim that students should be taught to speak of things that have meaning to the pupils themselves. "Teachers should get children to talk about what they think, what they believe, how they feel, what they are worried about or puzzled about" (Ekwall, 1973, p.88).

In summary, positive psychological effects were noted during the course of the LEA instruction. Just as Hall (1976) suggested--that a healthy self-image can be promoted through successful language experience activities (p.9), the two subjects of this study seemed to develop a feeling of accomplishment as they saw their own language, both oral and written, valued and used in ESOL instruction.

Implementation of the LEA Program

The present investigation addressed the following criteria: (1) selected reading strategies; (2) teacher's time; and (3) resource materials. These areas are discussed in sequence below.

Selected Reading Strategies

Graphophonic analysis of words was attempted by practice of initial sounds and rhyming words, association of letter symbols with corresponding letter sounds, and practice at recognition and writing of letters and words in both cursive and print. The researcher employed a variety of commercial materials on phonic instruction.

Since not much emphasis was placed on the graphophonic cue system, signs of improvement were seen only in the recognition of the isolated sounds: b, c, d, t, s, v. At the end of the instructional term, however, the students were able to identify and write letters in both cursive and print. Subject one appeared to be weak in fine motor skills in comparison to Subject two who showed dexterity in handwriting. Additionally, subject one began sounding the initial part of a word in order to predict the pronunciation of the whole word.

The syntactic structure of words and sentences received more attention than the graphophonic structure in this study. Function words listed on the Silvaroli word list were placed in context. First, the students made their own sentences with the assistance of the researcher. Secondly, the investigator introduced other examples. Thirdly, the pupils were asked to employ the function words in new sentences.

A written construction drill appeared to be useful in providing practice with sentence patterns. The pupils were first asked to list color words and color the shape drawn on the side of each word. Then, the

researcher wrote down the name of objects whose color corresponded to the color on the students' list. Only the names of objects indicated by the students were written down. Then students were asked to make oral sentences using the lists of color words and objects. Finally, this activity was followed up by another written construction drill using the verb "to be."

Punctuation was emphasized since the students had been introduced to the concept by the regular classroom teacher. Although the students became aware of the main uses of two punctuation marks (periods, commas) and of capitalization, they themselves did not make consistent use of them in their own writing.

Of the three cue systems, the semantic system was the most emphasized in the study. The students developed their own personal vocabulary word bank, based on their language experience stories. The words were taken both in and out of context. The pupils were able to read and use these words in different sentences.

Pictures were used to promote semantic clues. They appeared to be useful in making the object or story more concrete for the students. The investigator also utilized pictures to alert the students in predictive skills. At this level, the pictures seemed to be effective for descriptions, rather than sequencing of a story.

Additionally, practice was provided in recognizing the main idea and topic sentences. Exercises on predicting meaning from titles were useful but the two students did not demonstrate enough confidence to make predictions.

According to Hall (1976), semantic input facilitates reading in initial instruction. The findings of this investigation appeared to indicate that this was, indeed, the case with the two subjects.

In summary, the language experience stories provided reading instruction in a meaningful context at the level of instruction being investigated. The stories moreover, developed enough semantic output for these two semi-literate ESOL pupils in order for them to read stories of approximate readability encoded by other writers.

Teacher's Time

This study indicated that a great amount of time is required to make the LEA methodology effective. Because the writing and reading materials are based on the student's interests and individual needs, much time was required to plan and prepare follow-up activities. In brief, reading instruction of these two semi-literate ESOL students using the language experience approach, was dependent, for the most part, on the teacher's resources and, consequently, on the teacher's time.

Resource Materials

Hall (1976) and Stauffer (1973) highlighted the significance of self-expression and creativity in the LEA. In order to promote experiential and creative learning, many materials were required; construction paper, stencils, and writing instruments were mainly used. Interestingly enough, prior to this term of instruction, the two subjects had not been exposed to a variety of the materials used with them. Moreover, although motivation and stimulus were provided by the use of materials, the question of availability of materials and resources, in general, was a difficult question to deal with due to the fact that budget is a major concern of the school system.

Summary

This section included the tentative findings of this investigation. The next section will present the conclusions of this study.

Conclusions and Implications

Taking into consideration the general nature of this study and its obvious limitations, a few general observations are pertinent. There is little doubt in the investigator's mind, regarding the feasibility of the LEA methodology for use with semi-literate ESOL adolescents. On the contrary, positive effects were observed in both the behavior and reading ability of the two subjects. The investigator found some difficulties in trying to meet in such a short period of instructional time some of the premises and suggested standards of the LEA as described by Stauffer (1973) and Hall (1976). Realistically employed, the LEA would appear to be an extremely valid approach to use with semi-literate ESOL adolescents. This investigation also indicated the potential of this approach in meeting the needs of individualized instruction in multi-level ESOL classes.

Recommendations for Further Study

The purpose of this study was to acquire initial insights into the use of the LEA methodology with semi-literate ESOL adolescents. To this extent, the data obtained suggested, first of all, the need for further study.

There is need for research using controlled measures for diagnostic assessment and evaluation of the student strengths and weaknesses.

Development of materials to be used in conjunction with language experience stories is another research project. There is a need for materials geared to the needs of semi-literate ESOL students, especially for reading instruction.

Another potential research direction may be the study of reading strategies employed by semi-literate ESOL students.

Further investigation is needed on valid reading strategies for teaching reading to these students; for example, the validity of the cloze

procedure in connection with the language experience stories produced by semi-literate ESOL adolescents.

Finally, few research projects have been carried out on the applicability of the LEA with special populations (Hall, 1977, p.31). Therefore, there would be a need to investigate the use of LEA with other population groups. A study on the effects of cultural differences on the success of the LEA methodology, moreover, merits consideration.

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APPENDIX A

FSI ORAL PROFICIENCY RATING

UP-DATED DESCRIPTIONS

ORAL PROFICIENCY RATINGS

The language proficiency interview is different from other common testing techniques because the ratings are not based on some numerical calculation such as the number of questions answered correctly, but rather on an overall judgment about the student's language proficiency. This overall judgment is made in terms of five verbal descriptions of competence. These five descriptions, and the levels of proficiency they represent, are shown below:

Level 1

Able to satisfy routine travel needs and minimum courtesy requirements. Can ask and answer questions on topics very familiar to him; within the scope of his very limited language experience can understand simple questions and statements, allowing for slowed speech, repetition or paraphrase; speaking vocabulary inadequate to express anything but the most elementary needs; errors in pronunciation and grammar are frequent, but can be understood by a native speaker used to dealing with foreigners attempting to speak his language. While elementary needs vary considerably from individual to individual, any person at level 1 should be able to order a simple meal, ask for shelter or lodging, ask and give simple directions, make purchases, and tell time.

Level 2

Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements. Can handle with confidence but not with facility most social situations including introductions and casual conversations about current events, as well as work, family, and autobiographical information; can handle limited work requirements, needing help in handling any complications or difficulties;

can get the gist of most conversations on non-technical subjects (i.e. topics which require no specialized knowledge) and has a speaking vocabulary sufficient to express himself simply with some circumlocutions; accent, though often quite faulty, is intelligible; can usually handle elementary constructions quite accurately but does not have thorough or confident control of the grammar.

Level 3

Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics. Can discuss particular interests and special fields of competence with reasonable ease; comprehension is quite complete for a normal rate of speech; vocabulary is broad enough that he rarely has to grope for a word; accent may be obviously foreign; control of grammar good; errors never interfere with understanding and rarely disturb the native speaker.

Level 4

Able to use the language fluently and accurately on all levels normally pertinent to professional needs. Can understand and participate in any conversation within the range of his experience with a high degree of fluency and precision of vocabulary; would rarely be taken for a native speaker, but can respond appropriately even in unfamiliar situations; errors of pronunciation and grammar quite rare; can handle informal interpreting from and into the language.

Level 5

Speaking proficiency equivalent to that of an educated native speaker. Has complete fluency in the language such that his speech on all levels is

fully accepted by educated native speakers in all of its features, including breadth of vocabulary and idiom, colloquialisms, and pertinent cultural references.

The language proficiency interview is not simply a friendly conversation on whatever topics happen to come in mind (although it should give the appearance of an informal, natural conversation). It is, rather, a specialized procedure which efficiently uses the relatively brief testing period to explore many different aspects of the student's language competence in order to place him into one of the categories described.

LEVEL DESCRIPTIONS FOR ORAL INTERACTION

Level 0: No ability to understand or speak the language.

Level 0A: Unable to function in the spoken language. Oral production is limited to occasional isolated words. Essentially no communicative ability.

Level 0B: Able to operate only in a very limited capacity within very predictable areas of need. Vocabulary limited to that necessary to express simple elementary needs and basic courtesy formulae. Syntax is fragmented, inflections and word endings frequently omitted, confused or distorted and the majority of utterances consist of isolated words or short formulae. Utterances rarely consist of more than two or three words and are marked by frequent long pauses and repetition of an interlocutor's words. Pronunciation is frequently unintelligible and is strongly influenced by first language. Can be understood only with difficulty, even by persons such as teachers who are used to speaking with non-native speakers or in interactions where the context strongly supports the utterance.

Level 0C: Able to satisfy immediate needs using learned utterances. There is no real autonomy of expression, although there may be some emerging signs of spontaneity and flexibility. There is a slight increase in utterance length but frequent long pauses and repetition of interlocutor's words still occur. Can ask questions or make statements with reasonable accuracy only where this involves short memorized utterances or formulae. Most utterances are telegraphic and word endings (both inflectional and non-inflectional) are often omitted, confused or distorted. Vocabulary is limited to areas of immediate survival needs. Can differentiate most phonemes when produced in isolation but when they are combined in words or groups of words, errors are frequent and, even with repetition, may severely inhibit communication even with persons used to dealing with such learners. Little development in stress and intonation is evident.

Level 1A: <u>Able to satisfy basic survival needs and minimum courtesy requirements</u>. In areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics, can ask and answer simple questions, initiate and respond to simple statements, and maintain very simple face-to-face conversations. Almost every utterance contains fractured syntax and other grammatical errors. Vocabulary inadequate to express anything but the most elementary needs. Strong interference from L_1 occurs in articulation, stress and intonation. Misunderstandings frequently arise from limited vocabulary and grammar and erroneous phonology but, with repetition, can generally be understood by native speakers in regular contact with foreigners attempting to speak their language. Little precision in information conveyed owing to tentative state of grammatical development and little or no use of modifiers.

Level 1B: Some evidence of grammatical accuracy in basic constructions, e.g. subject-verb agreement, noun-adjective agreement, some notion of inflection. Vocabulary permits discussion of topics beyond basic survival needs, e.g. personal history, leisure time activities.

Level 1C: <u>Able to satisfy all survival needs and limited social demands</u>. Developing flexibility in a range of circumstances beyond immediate survival needs. Shows some spontaneity in language production but fluency is very uneven. Can initiate and sustain a general conversation but has little understanding of the social conventions of conversation. Limited vocabulary range necessitates much hesitation and circumlocution. The commoner tense forms occur but errors are frequent in formation and selection. Can use most question forms. While basic word order is established, errors still occur in more complex patterns. Cannot sustain coherent structures in longer utterances or unfamiliar situations. Ability to describe and give precise information is limited. Aware of basic cohesive features (e.g., pronouns, verb inflections), but many are unreliable, especially if less immediate in reference. Extended discourse is largely a series of short, discrete utterances. Articulation is reasonably comprehensible to native speakers, can combine most phonemes with reasonable comprehensibility, but still has difficulty in producing certain sounds, in certain positions, or in certain combinations, and speech will usually be labored. Still has to repeat utterances frequently to be understood by the general public.

SOME SUGGESTED ADAPTATIONS OF THE FSI SCALE WITH EQUIVALENT VALUES

5.0
4.5
4.0

"SUPERIOR" This rating connotes no pattern of error in speech with fully developed vocabulary and comprehension.

3.5
3.0
2.5
2.0

As currently described in the FSI Scale

1.5 Suggested 1-C

1.0 Suggested 1-B, 1-A

0.5 Suggested 0-C, 0-B

0.0 Suggested 0-A, 0-0

APPENDIX F

LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE STORIES

SAMPLE OF

LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE

STORIES

****

SUBJECT 1

****

My friend name Da moved tp washington State. Da he's a good friend before he help me. I cannot read English. I want to know how to read because I don't know how to read. I will understand the words in the book.

In my country we have elephants. Some elephants like fish, some elephants no fish. Elephants scare fish. Fish in the nose. When men come from fishing, elephants scare.

Mr. and Mrs. Sesum have seven sons and three daughters. They have four bedrooms, two dining rooms, two bathrooms and two kitchens. We have two apartments. They are medium size.

My sister husband have a car. He drive the car, go to work. My father go to school. Some day my mother go to work in the farm. Saturday and Sunday she study in the school. Last summer I help my mother work in the farm. I have $25.00. I like work; I eat strawberries and I work.

****

SUBJECT 2

****

I like home ec. I don't know how to say it. I am cooking and my teacher talked to me. What's the kitchen? And my friends said "Can you read it?" No, I don't know how to read. But I can talk. You're gonna get "B". I don't care about B.

I like to eat apples. I like to eat cake. I like to eat orange and I like to eat ice cream. I like to drink chocolate milk and I like to drink water.

Mr. and Mrs. Matmanivong have two sons and three daughters. They have a cat. They have a nice house. They have two bedrooms, one diningroom, one bathroom, and one kitchen.

Mr. Matmanivong has a car. He goes to school, too. The children go to school but the youngest does not go to school. I am Phetsamay. I work with my mother. I clean my house.

Mr. and Mrs. Ryan they have two son, one daughter. She have a cat. They have a big house. The grandmother is old. The grandmother cook. The grandfather work at home. They have a dog. The dog color is brown.

Steve is son name. He's wearing shirt and shorts. His friend come to the house. He's strong. He play football and drive a motorcycle. The girl name Mary. She hold baby. Baby is happy.

****

SUBJECT 1 AND SUBJECT 2

****

A FIELDTRIP

Friday we go to Science Museum. The weather fine,everybody happy. Man speak about heart. We listen and do exercises. We saw fish. Mr. Wacks help us. We have fun .

PLAY DOUGH

Today we made play dough. Mrs. Ben-Barka bring flour, salt and paint. We mix evrything; put water. I make airplane and letters.(Subject 1)
I make dog and flowers. (Subject 2)

****
CREATIVE POEMS : Final Copy
****

SUBJECT 1

I am an elepnant sound afraid
of fish.
I am 7:00 because it's time to
wake up.
I am football playing on the
ground.
I am a Pepsi in the SUMMER.
I am Lao and ...Hyattsville.
I am green and white shorts and
jeans.
I am a daffodil and a tree.
I am New Year's Day because I
bring change and a new year.
I am apples and beef together
with a box and a dictionary.

SUBJECT 2

I am sewing machine making a dress.
I am like 6:30 p.m. watching Tv.
I am Fall with many colored trees.
I am soccer kicking the ball.
I like to color dogs red.
I am high-heeled shoes with a
beautiful dress.
I am a green tree, sometimes I am
Summer.